R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 018 445 TE 500 072

PROFILE OF THE POOR WRITER--THE RELATIONSHIP OF SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS TO POOR WRITING IN COLLEGE.

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PUB DATE JAN 65

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$2.24 54P.

DESCRIPTORS- *ENGLISH, *COLLEGE STUDENTS, *COMPOSITION (LITERARY), *STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS, *LOW ACHIEVERS, UNDERGRADUATE STUDY, COMPOSITION SKILLS (LITERARY), WRITING, WRITING SKILLS, EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH, TABLES (DATA), STUDENT ATTITUDES, STUDENT EVALUATION, EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND, FAMILY BACKGROUND, INDEPENDENT READING, UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI, CORAL GABLES,

A STUDY OF THE SPECIFIC BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS OF WRITING GROUPS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI WAS CONDUCTED IN ORDER TO DETERMINE THE BACKGROUND PROFILE OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE CONSIDERED POOR WRITERS, I.E., STUDENTS WHO RECEIVED D OR E IN WRITING FOR THE SEMESTER PRIOR TO THIS STUDY. DATA OBTAINED FROM STUDENT ANSWERS TO A QUESTIONNAIRE ARE BRIEFLY ANALYZED AND PRESENTED IN 45 TABLES. IN THE SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS CHAPTER, 42 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POOR WRITER AND 19 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GOOD WRITER ARE LISTED. A LIST OF TABLES AND AN APPENDIX CONTAINING THE QUESTIONNAIRE GIVEN TO STUDENTS ARE INCLUDED. (BN)

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JOHN C. WOODWARD

JANUARY, 1965

Report 10

ED 018443

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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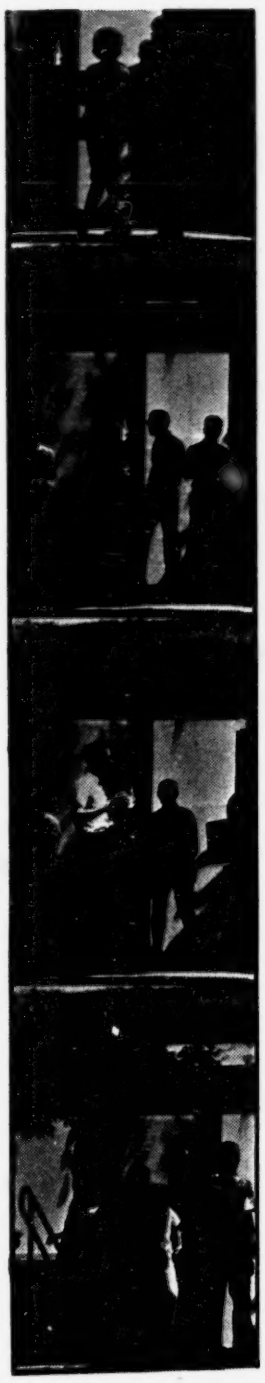

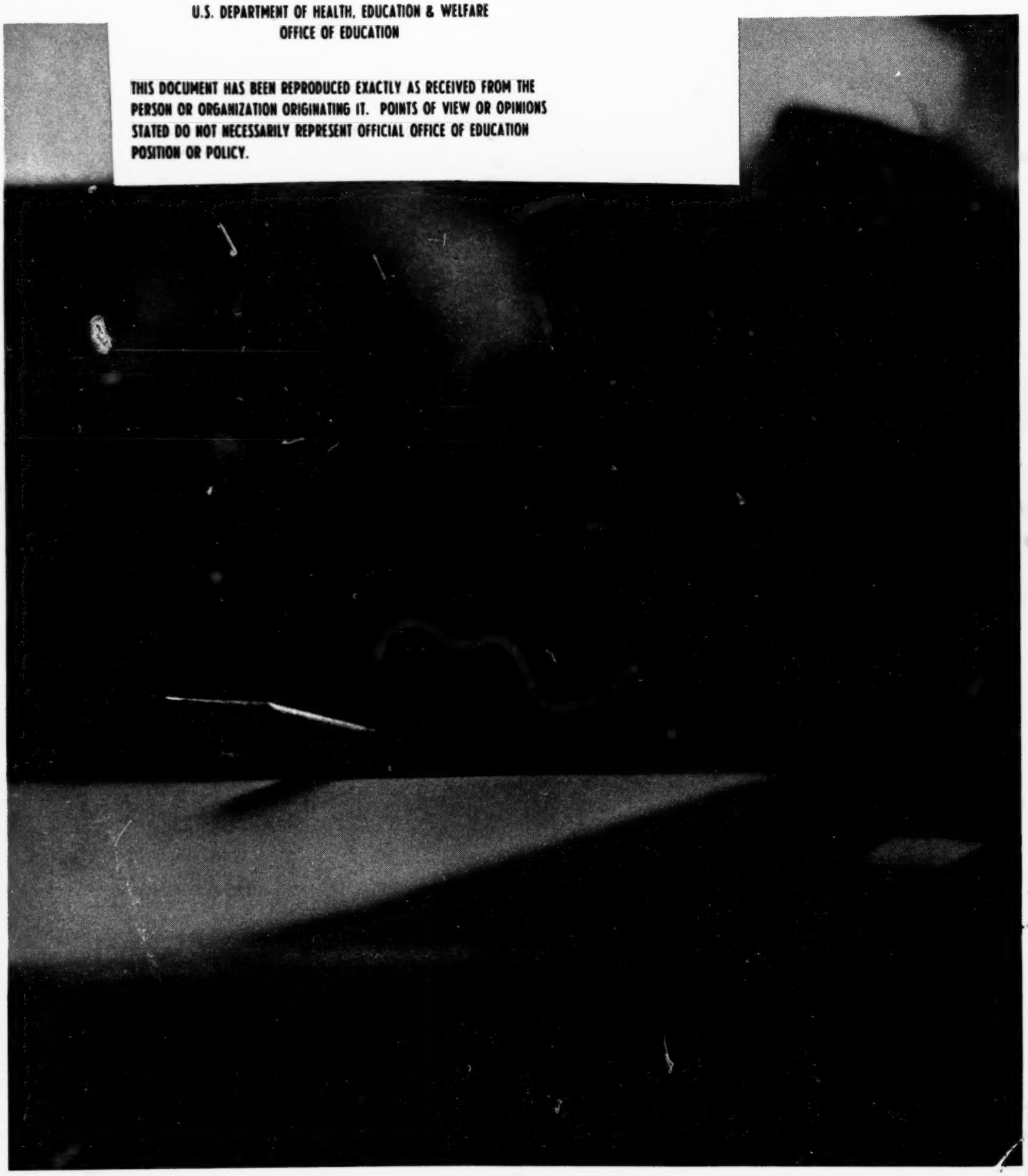

SUPPORTED BY A GRANT FROM THE FUND FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF EDUCATION

PROFILE OF THE POOR WRITER-THE RELATIONSHIP OF SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS TO POOR WRITING IN COLLEGE

John C. Woodward
June 1965

Report Number 10

This research was conducted at the request of Professor Arthur G. Phillips, Coordinator of the Writing Conference at the University of Miami. Professor Phillips contributed greatly to the development of the questionnaire used in this research.

Office for the Study of Instruction, University College, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida.

This study conducted under a grant from the Fund for the Advancement of Education.

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Profile of the Poor Writer-The Relationship of Selected Characteristics to Poor Writing in College

Introduction and Statement of the Problem

One of the important concerns of college instructors of English and of the college institutional staff in general is the quality of the writing of college students. All too frequently the charge is made by college professors that, "these kids just can't write." Obviously, this is not completely true as evidenced by the many colleges and universities who offer honors courses in English composition to freshmen students as well as the so-called remedial courses. It is true, however, that a large investment of time and money is being made toward helping the "poor writer."

What makes a writer poor? Many have tried to answer this question and almost anyone will give you an opinion on the subject. This research was designed to answer some of the questions concerned with the background, "profile" of individuals who are considered "poor writers."

For the purpose of this study, the poor writer was defined as a student who received 'D' or 'E' in writing for the semester previous to this study. A good writer was defined as a student who received 'A' or 'B' and an average writer as one who received 'C' in writing.

Method of Procedure

The second semester 1963-64, a questionnaire (appendix A) was administered to all students enrolled in the Writing Conference and ninety-one students (selected at random) enrolled in the special honors seminars in Humanities the previous semester. Answers to the questionnaire were marked by the students on IBM answer cards to facilitate machine punching and computer analysis.

Analysis of Data and Results

Table I is a summary of the School and College Ability Test meansfor the groups defined as "good" and "poor" writers.

Table I

School and College Ability Test
Mean Scores by Group

Group	School and College Ability Test					
	Verbal		Quantitative		Total	
	Mean	Std.Dev.	Mean	Std.Dev.	Mean	Std.Dev.
Good	61.97	18.36	55.23	24.02	58.62	21.62
Poor	47.59	21.84	45.22	22.76	45.00	22.16

To test the significance of the difference in the means between the groups reported in Table I, analysis of t was used. The mean differences for the linguistic, quantitative and total scores between groups are all significant at the .001 level of confidence. This indicates that differences as great as those reported in Table I would not occur by chance more than once in 1,000 times.

Table II is a report of the number of students by grade category utilized in the study. A total of 927 students was used in this study.

Table II

Number and Percent of Students by Grade Category

A and B (Good)		C (Average)		D and E (Poor)	
N	%	N	%	N	%
284	31	476	52	159	17

To show differences in intended course of study among the groups, Table III was constructed.

Table III

Writing Category by Intended Course of Study

Group	Writing Category			
	Good %	Average %	Poor %	Total %
Arts & Science	39	57	4	38
Business Adm.	25	57	18	29
Education	26	52	22	19
Engineering	33	44	23	7
Other	25	45	30	7
Total	31	52	17	100

Selected Chi square analysis of the data from which Table II was generated reveals the following information:

1. A significantly greater proportion of students select Arts and Sciences over the other areas represented.

2. A significantly smaller proportion of Arts and Sciences students, in relation to their proportion in the total population, are found in the "poor" writer category. The large percentage of Arts and Science students found in the "good" writer category is not significantly greater than would be expected from their proportion in the total population.

Table IV is a report of the distribution of students in the various categories by sex.

Table IV

Writing Categories by Sex Group

Group	Writing Category							
	Good		Average		Poor		Total	
	N	GP%	N	GP%	N	GP%	N	GP%
Male	171	28	310	51	127	21	608	66
Female	113	37	166	53	32	10	311	34
Total	284	31	476	52	159	17	919	100

A comparison of the number of female and male students in the "good" writer and "poor" writer categories was made in relation to the number expected from the proportion found in the total population.

This analysis demonstrated that there are significantly more females in the "good" writer category and significantly fewer in the "poor" writer category when compared to males than would be expected from total population statistics.

Students were asked to indicate their age according to four given ranges. Age groups were then arranged according to the writing group categories. The result of this grouping is reported in Table V.

Table V

Writing Category by Age Group

Group	Writing Category						Total	
	Good		Average		Poor			
	N	GP%	N	GP%	N	GP%	N	GP%
Under 18	28	26	61	56	20	18	109	12
18 - 20	231	31	391	52	131	17	753	82
21 - 22	11	34	16	50	5	16	32	4
23 - 25	7	54	6	46	0	0	13	1
26+	7	58	2	17	3	25	12	1
Total	284	31	476	52	159	17	919	100

From the material contained in Table V it can be seen that the great proportion of students are in the 18 to 20 age group. The number of students in each writing category by age group is not significantly different than the number expected within chance population variability except in the 23-25 and 26 or over age groups. Here the numbers found are significantly greater in the "good" writer group. In view of the small number in these groups, this finding is more a matter of interest than importance to the writing program.

Eye defects are tabulated for all three writing categories in Table VI.

Table VI

Writing Category by Eye Defects Group

Eye Defects Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
None	29	52	19	56
Correct to 20/20	39	49	12	35
Do Not Correct to 20/20	21	63	16	5
Other Eye Problems	25	56	19	4
Total	31	52	17	100

The large proportion of students with eye defects which correct to 20/20 with glasses found in the "good" writer category is significantly greater and the small percentage found in the "poor" writer category is significantly smaller than expected from the proportion of this group in the general population in comparison to the other eye defect groups.

Students were asked to record any hearing defects from none to severe loss. Ninety-six percent of the students reported that they had no defects, two percent slight loss, and two percent distributed over the group of loss corrected by hearing aid; severe loss not corrected and other ear problems that interfere with listening ability.

Statistical techniques applied to these data demonstrate no differences in hearing groups for writing ability.

Religious preference by writing categories is recorded in Table VII.

Table VII

Writing Category by Religious Preference Group

Religious Group	Writing Category			
	Good %	Average %	Poor %	Total %
Catholic	25	54	22	27
Jewish	31	54	15	40
Protestant	36	48	16	24
Other	22	61	17	2
None	35	43	22	7
Total	31	52	17	100

Statistical tests of differences noted in Table VII indicate no significant differences among or between religious groups by writing category.

A check of geographic background as related to writing ability was made. See Appendix 1, question number 9 for detailed description of areas. The result of this check is reported in Table VIII.

Table VIII

Writing Categories by Geographic Background

Group	Writing Category			
	Good %	Average %	Poor %	Total %
East	26	57	17	57
Midwest	32	46	22	15
South	39	47	14	26
West	38	47	15	2
Total	31	52	17	100

The number of students from the south is greater for the "good" writing category than expected from enumeration data for the total population. The small number of students from the east in the "good" group is not significantly less than expected by chance fluctuation in sampling.

A small percentage, 12%, of the students in this study have resided in a country other than the United States most of their lives. Comparisons of these students of foreign extraction were made with the American students for the various writing categories. Table IX represents these comparisons.

Table IX

Writing Categories by Native Background

Group	Writing Category			
	Good %	Average %	Poor %	Total %
Foreign	25	50	25	12
American	31	52	17	88

The differences noted in Table IX between the foreign student and American student for the writing categories are not significant.

Answers to the question concerning foreign language spoken regularly in the home were noted and tabulated by writing classification in Table X. (Question 11, Appendix A)

Table X

Writing Categories by Foreign Language Spoken Regularly in the Home

Group	Writing Category			
	Good %	Average %	Poor %	Total %
Teutonic	37	44	19	8
Romance	22	58	20	7
Slavic	46	54	0	1
Other	40	51	9	6
None	30	53	17	78
Total	31	52	17	100

Difference in distribution of groups within writing categories was noted from Table X and compared among groups. Statistical analysis reveals a significant difference among the groups for the "good" writing category. A significantly larger proportion of the Slavic group is found in this category and a smaller proportion of the Romance group than would be expected in relation to their proportions of the general population. It should be noted that both of these groups are in small number in the total population. The importance of these findings must take this into consideration.

Students were asked to indicate the type of high school they attended so that comparison by writing ability categories could be made. Table XI is the result of this comparison.

Table XI

Writing Category by High School Type

Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
Public	35	48	16	78
Private*	23	57	20	16
Parochial	26	55	19	6
Total	31	52	17	100

*Other than parochial

A significantly smaller number of students from private, other than parochial schools are found in the "good" writer group. Although the students with public school background have a high percentage in the "good" category it is not significantly greater than expected from their proportion in the total population. The same is true of the parochial school students in relation to their low percentage in the "good" category.

The approximate population of the town in which students lived during the major part of the five years before coming to the University was checked. A summary of these findings is included in Table XII.

Table XII

Writing Category by Hometown Population Background

Population Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
Less than 2,500	22	56	22	8
2,500 - 10,000	28	49	23	25
10,000 - 100,000	33	54	13	24
100,000 - 500,000	31	51	18	12
Over 500,000	34	51	15	31
Total	31	52	17	100

The student from the "less than 2500" population group does not achieve as well as students from the other groups. A small percentage of the "less than 2,500" group is found in the "good" writer group than one would expect from general population statistics.

The approximate size of the senior high class of these students was checked and summarized in Table XIII.

Table XIII

Writing Category by Size of Senior High School Class

Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
Less than 50	31	50	19	14
50 - 200	29	50	21	32
200 - 500	32	50	18	29
500 - 1,000	31	58	11	14
Over 1,000	32	59	9	11
Total	31	52	17	100

The differences noted for the "good" writer category in Table XIII are not significant. The differences among the groups in the "poor" category are significant, however. This finding may be attributed to the smaller number of students found in this category for the "500-1000" and "over 1000" groups and the larger number of 50-200 group.

Students were asked to indicate the average size (number of students) in their English classes in high school. These responses were analyzed and recorded in Table XIV.

Table XIV

Writing Category by Size of High School English Class

Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
Less than 15	31	52	17	10
15 - 25	32	51	17	39
26 - 35	30	52	18	43
36 - 45	27	56	17	8
Over 45	Less than 1%, not analyzed			
Total	31	52	17	100

As indicated in Table XIV, the largest percentage of students come from high school English classes in the 15 - 25 and 26 - 35 range. Eighty-two percent are found in these combined groups, i.e., 15 - 35. Difference in categories among groups are not significant.

The responses of students to the question concerning family income are presented in Table XV.

Table XV

Writing Category by Family Income

Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
Under 5,000	30	45	25	7
5,000 - 8,000	36	45	19	18
8,000 - 10,000	29	55	16	19
10,000 - 15,000	31	54	15	19
Over 15,000	29	54	17	37
Total	31	52	17	100

The differences noted in Table XV are not significant.

A study of the relationship of the father's occupation as defined by question number 17 on the questionnaire and writing achievement was made. Table XVI is a presentation of this information.

Table XVI

Writing Category by Father's Occupation

Group	Writing Category			
	Good %	Average %	Poor %	Total %
Professional	30	52	18	23
Businessman	29	55	16	56
Skilled Worker	46	37	17	10
Semiskilled	19	49	32	4
Clerk or Kindred	30	52	18	7
Total	31	52	17	100

Analysis of the differences in writing ability among the groups by the occupation of the father indicates a significantly larger proportion of the skilled worker group and a significantly smaller proportion of the semiskilled group in the "good" writer group. This means that there is a tendency for students whose fathers are in the skilled worker class to do better than the other groups considered and for the students whose fathers are in the semiskilled class to not do as well as the other groups. The proportion of students in the "poor" writer category for the semiskilled group is by statistical test significantly larger than the other groups.

The relationship of mother's occupation to writing achievement was checked. A summary of the findings appears in Table XVII.

Table XVII

Writing Category by Mother's Occupation

Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
None	30	53	17	65
Professional	35	43	22	11
Businessman	30	56	14	9
Semiskilled	28	48	24	3
Clerk or kindred	33	48	19	8
Total	31	52	17	100

Analysis reveals no significant relationship between mother's occupation and the writing ability of the students.

Table XVIII is a summary of the writing ability of students as related to the father's education (questions 19 and 20).

Table XVIII

Writing Category by Father's Educational Background, Highest Grade Completed

Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
8th grade or less	33	47	20	10
9th grade	17	60	23	5
10th grade	28	50	22	4
11th grade	32	56	12	11
12th grade	31	52	17	16
College Freshman	33	50	17	5
College Sophomore	30	54	16	9
College Junior	30	55	15	5
College Senior	36	50	14	9
Graduate	29	52	19	26
Total	31	52	17	100

From the information contained in Table XVIII, it was determined that there is little difference in the ability to write among students with fathers of various educational backgrounds. Only in the case of the ninth grade group do we note a significantly smaller percentage than would be expected in the "good" writer category.

The writing ability of students who came from families with mothers of various educational backgrounds is presented in Table XIX.

Table XIX

Writing Category by Mother's Educational Background, Highest Grade Completed

Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
8th grade or less	37	43	20	5
9th grade	16	75	9	4
10th grade	21	49	30	4
11th grade	28	57	15	14
12th Grade	25	58	17	34
College Freshman	35	57	8	7
College Sophomore	37	50	13	12
College Junior	47	46	7	3
College Senior	19	56	25	6
Graduate	35	44	21	11
Total	31	52	17	100

From an analysis of the data contained in Table XIX, it was found that there are significantly fewer students in the "good" writing category for the 9th grade and college senior groups than expected from chance variations and more than expected for the college junior group.

There are fewer students than expected in the "poor" writer category for the ninth grade, college freshman and college junior groups, and a significantly larger number for the tenth grade category.

Table XX is a comparison of students with writing ability grouped by the course they enjoyed most in high school.

Table XX

Analysis by Writing Category for the question: What course did you enjoy most in high school (mark first choice only)?

Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
English	46	48	6	15
Math	24	58	18	17
Science	31	49	20	22
Social Studies	30	52	18	22
Other	26	53	21	24
Total	31	52	17	100

Students who report that they enjoyed English more than any other subject in high school do significantly better in college writing than students who report that they enjoyed other courses more than English. It is noted that fewer students who enjoyed English in high school are found in the "poor" writer category than would be expected by chance.

A summary of the responses to question twenty-four is presented in Table XXI.

Analysis of the material contained in Table XXI reveals that students who spent 20-30 minutes reading the daily newspaper during their senior year in high school are not found in the "poor" writer group as frequently as those in the other groups. These students do not differ from the other groups for the "good" category, however. Students in the over 30 minutes group have a significantly higher percentage in the "good" category than do the other groups.

Table XXI

Analysis by Writing Category of the question:
How much time did you spend each day
reading the daily newspaper during
your senior year in high school?

Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
None	31	50	19	11
5-10 min.	30	49	21	33
10-20 min.	28	56	16	32
20-30 min.	31	59	10	12
Over 30 min.	44	41	15	11
Total	31	52	17	100

Question number twenty-five of the questionnaire is analyzed in Table XXII.

Table XXII

Analysis by Writing Category of the question:
How many magazines were regularly
subscribed to in your home?

Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
None	29	52	19	7
One	35	43	22	14
Two	29	52	19	16
Three	24	61	15	18
Four or More	33	52	15	45
Total	31	52	17	100

There are no significant differences noted among writing categories by group for number of magazines in the homes of students.

A summary of the findings for question number twenty-six is found in Table XXIII.

Table XXIII

Analysis by Writing Category of the question: Approximately how many books were in your home "library" excluding technical books, standard references, and Bibles?

Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
None	22	44	34	4
5 - 10	26	54	20	12
10 - 30	30	52	18	18
30 - 100	31	55	14	25
Over 100	33	51	16	41
Total	31	52	17	100

The largest percentage of students (41%) came from homes with large libraries. Although the "none" group is represented by a small percentage of students, 4%, they do have a significantly greater percentage than expected in the "poor" writer category.

The analysis of question twenty-seven is given in Table XXIV.

Groups represented in Table XXIV do not differ statistically.

Table XXV is an analysis of question twenty-eight for the questionnaire.

Table XXIV

Analysis by Writing Category of the question: How many term papers (of considerable length and due at the end of the term) were required by your courses in your senior year in high school?

Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
None	35	49	16	21
One	30	56	14	33
Two	32	47	21	24
Three	23	59	18	12
Four or more	30	49	21	10
Total	31	52	17	100

Table XXV

Analysis by Writing Category of the question: Approximately how many themes or essays were required each semester in your English Composition classes in high school?

Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
None	28	48	24	12
1 - 3	30	54	16	27
4 - 6	31	49	20	19
7 - 9	30	55	14	16
Over 9	33	52	15	26
Total	31	52	17	100

Although there are no real differences for the "good" writer category among the groups, the students who are in the none group are found more frequently than expected in the "poor" writer category.

The analysis for question twenty-nine is found in Table XXVI.

Table XXVI

Analysis by Writing Category of the question: Aside from textbooks, how many books were you required to read in your senior year in high school?

Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
None	26	48	26	7
One	34	50	16	17
2 - 5	28	56	16	35
6 - 10	34	49	17	25
Over 10	29	52	19	16
Total	31	52	17	100

Students who report that they were not required to read any books aside from textbooks in their senior year of high school have a significantly higher than expected percentage in the "poor" writer group.

The analysis of question thirty may be found in Table XXVII.

Students who did "a great deal" of voluntary writing in high school do significantly better in college writing than the other groups. There appears to be a relationship between the amount of voluntary writing in high school and writing ability in college. This relationship is not statistically significant, however.

Table XXVII

Analysis by Writing Category of the question: How much voluntary writing did you do during your senior year in high school? (e.g. letters, short stories, essays, plays, poetry, etc.)

Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
None	25	55	20	33
Very little	32	52	16	52
A great deal	40	42	18	15
Total	31	52	17	100

Question number thirty-one is analyzed and reported in Table XXVIII.

Table XXVIII

Analysis by Writing Category of the question: Approximately how many books did you read voluntarily during your last two years of high school?

Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
None	25	54	21	11
1 - 2	24	57	19	20
3 - 5	29	56	15	23
6 - 10	31	50	19	17
More than 10	38	46	16	29
Total	31	52	17	100

There is a tendence for students who read books voluntarily to do better in college writing. This finding is not statistically significant, however.

A summary of the findings for question 32 is reported in Table XXIX.

Table XXIX

Analysis by Writing Category of the question: Approximately how much time during your last year in high school English classes did you spend on the formal study of grammar?

Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
None	35	49	16	20
Less than 1/4 time	25	57	18	37
About 1/4 time	31	54	15	27
About 1/2 time	34	43	23	14
More than 1/2 time	50	44	6	2
Total	31	52	17	100

Although the percentage of students from the "more than one-half time" is large for the "good" category and small for the "poor" category, it should be noted that this group is made up of only two percent of the total group; therefore, little significance can be given to this finding. Other noted differences are not significant.

A question (number 33) was given to the students concerning their reading habits during the first semester. Results are depicted in Table XXX.

Differences found in Table XXX are not significant. There is a tendency for students who read more books other than those assigned, to do better in writing but it is not significant. The large percentage of students in the "good" category for "the more than 10" group does not reach significance because of the small percentage of these students contained in the general population.

Table XXX

Analysis by Writing Category of the question:
Other than assigned reading, how many
books have you read since the
beginning of the first
semester this year?

Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
None	29	52	19	36
1 - 2	27	55	18	33
3 - 5	32	54	14	19
6 - 10	36	48	16	6
More than 10	48	36	16	6
Total	31	52	17	100

The analysis of question 34 is found in Table XXXI.

Table XXXI

Analysis by Writing Category of the question:
What kind of books do you prefer to read?

Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
Non-fiction	32	49	19	33
Fiction	29	55	16	60
Technical	41	37	22	7
Total	31	52	17	100

No significant differences are present in the findings reported in Table XXXI.

Students were asked to indicate how much time they spent reading the daily newspaper each day. Table XXXII is a summary of their responses.

Table XXXII

Analysis by Writing Category of the question:
How much time do you now spend each day
reading the daily newspaper?

Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
None	29	49	22	30
5 - 10 minutes	29	55	16	31
10 - 20 minutes	28	54	18	21
20 - 30 minutes	35	52	13	12
More than 30 minutes	49	40	11	6
Total	31	52	17	100

One of the most interesting findings contained in Table XXXII is the low percentage of students who read the daily newspaper more than ten minutes each day and the finding that nearly one-third do not read the newspaper at all. Although the "more than 30 minutes" group is small, they do significantly better in writing than the other groups tabulated.

Question number 36 is analyzed in Table XXXIII.

Students who spend five to ten minutes reading magazines do not do as well in writing as the other groups.

Table XXXIII

Analysis by Writing Category of the question:
How much time do you now spend each
week reading magazines?

Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
None	33	50	17	19
5 - 10 minutes	22	57	21	22
10 - 30 minutes	30	54	16	28
30 minutes to 1 hour	35	49	16	14
More than 1 hour	37	48	15	18
Total	31	52	17	100

The question concerning movie attendance, number 37, is summarized in Table XXXIV.

Table XXXIV

Analysis by Writing Category of the question:
On the average, how often do you now
attend the movies each week?

Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
Once	29	63	18	51
2 - 3 times	26	68	16	6
4 or 5 times	0	0	0	0
More than 5 times	33	62	15	5
Very seldom	34	60	16	38
Total	31	52	17	100

There are no differences by writing category for movie attendance groups.

In Table XXXV can be found information concerning the relationship between TV viewing and writing ability.

Table XXXV

Analysis by Writing Category of the question:
How many hours do you spend viewing TV
each week?

Group	Writing Category			
	Good %	Average %	Poor %	Total %
None	28	64	18	57
1 - 5	34	50	16	31
6 - 10	33	62	15	6
11 - 15	44	36	20	3
More than 15	32	53	25	3
Total	31	52	17	100

A significantly larger percentage of students who view TV 11-15 hours each week are found in the "good" writer group and a smaller percentage in the "average" category.

Table XXXVI is the summary of the comic book reading habits of the students responding to the questionnaire.

Table XXXVI

Analysis by Writing Category of the question:
On the average, how many comic books do
you read each week?

Group	Writing Category			
	Good %	Average %	Poor %	Total %
None	30	54	16	92
1 or 2	39	35	26	5
2 - 5	38	31	31	1
5 - 10	14	72	14	1
Over 10	30	40	30	1
Total	31	52	17	100

The most obvious conclusion that can be drawn from the information in Table XXXVI is that only a small percentage of students read comic books in college. The differences noted among groups are not significant because of the small number of students represented by the comic book reading groups.

Question number forty of the questionnaire is analyzed in Table XXXVII.

Table XXXVII

Analysis by Writing Category of the question: How do you feel about the study of formal grammar?

Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
Hate to study it	29	51	20	26
Would rather not study it	30	55	15	40
Don't feel one way of another	30	50	20	23
Like to study it	39	45	16	8
Like very much to study it	46	43	11	3
Total	31	52	17	100

Students who like the study of formal grammar "very much" are found in larger numbers in the "good" writer category and in smaller numbers in the "poor" category than would be expected. It should be noted that sixty-six percent of the students do not like the study of formal grammar and only eleven percent like to study it.

In Table XXXVIII can be found the breakdown of the students' responses to the question concerning their feelings about writing in general.

Table XXXVIII

Analysis by Writing Category of the question:
How do you feel about writing in general?

Group	Writing Category			
	Good %	Average %	Poor %	Total %
I enjoy writing	43	45	12	33
I neither like nor dislike writing	29	56	15	37
I do not enjoy writing	20	54	26	30
Total	31	52	17	100

It should be noted that only thirty-three percent of the students report that they enjoy writing and thirty percent report that they do not enjoy writing. Of the students who do not enjoy writing a significantly smaller portion are found in the "good" writing category and a significantly larger portion in the "poor" category than are found in these categories for the two other groups. Students who enjoy writing are the "good" writers.

Students were questioned concerning their feelings about English teachers. The results are given in Table XXXIX.

Students who report that English teachers are their favorite teachers have a significantly higher percentage in the "good" writer category, and a lower percentage in the "average" category than the other groups. Students who dislike English teachers (3%) do not do as well as other groups. This is not a significant factor, however.

Question number forty-three of the questionnaire had to do with the students' attitudes toward writing as a skill. The responses to this are given in Table XL.

Table XXXIX

Analysis by Writing Category of the question:
What is your general feeling about
English teachers?

Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
My favorite teachers	45	38	17	7
I like them in general	34	50	16	35
I don't like them any better or worse than others	27	55	18	54
I don't like them in general	21	65	14	3
The most disliked of all	27	46	27	1
Total	31	52	17	100

Table XL

Analysis by Writing Category for Attitude
Toward Writing as a Skill

Group	Writing Category			
	Good	Average	Poor	Total
	%	%	%	%
One's most important skill	33	44	23	14
An important skill	32	53	15	74
No more or less important than other skills	18	57	25	9
Not as important as other skills	23	44	33	3
The least important of the skills	0	0	0	0
Total	31	52	17	100

Students who do not feel that writing is an important skill do not do as well in writing as the other groups. A significantly smaller percentage of students who are in the groups who say that writing is "no more or less important than other skills," or "not as important as other skills" are found in the "good" category and a significantly larger percentage in the "poor" category.

Table XLI is the result of tabulations for students' general overall feeling during the school semester.

Table XLI

Analysis by Writing Category of the question:
What was your overall feeling about
things in general during most
of the semester?

Group	Writing Category			
	Good %	Average %	Poor %	Total %
Very happy	40	47	13	16
Moderately happy	33	54	13	40
Neither happy nor Unhappy	25	56	19	22
Moderately unhappy	20	53	27	16
Very unhappy	21	49	30	6
Total	31	52	17	100

There are significantly more "very happy" students in the "good" writer category and significantly more "moderately unhappy" and "very unhappy" students in the "poor" writer category than expected in a Chi Square Analysis prediction.

Question forty-five is analyzed in Table XLII.

Table XLII
Analysis by Writing Category of the question:
My general attitude toward the
Writing Conference last
semester was:

Group	Writing Category			
	Good %	Average %	Poor %	Total %
Very positive	69	28	3	4
Positive	40	50	10	19
Neither positive nor negative	17	74	19	30
Negative	21	56	23	29
Very negative	19	52	29	18
Total	31	52	17	100

From Table XLII it becomes obvious that the students with very positive attitudes toward the Writing Conference are the students who do significantly better in writing. Students who range from "neither positive nor negative" to "very negative" do not do well in writing. It should be noted that thirty-seven percent of the students are negative while only twenty-three percent are positive.

In Table XLIII the various hobbies and special interests of students are represented in relationship to their writing skill.

Table XLIII
Analysis by Writing Category: Major Hobby or Special Interest

Group	Writing Category			
	Good %	Average %	Poor %	Total %
None	24	51	25	13
Reading	42	45	13	9
Writing	50	37	13	3
Coin Collecting	40	40	20	2
Stamp Collecting	37	47	16	2
Auto Mechanics	26	53	21	6
Photography	41	40	19	2
Spectator Sports	21	62	17	7
Participating Sports	27	52	21	33
Other	31	54	15	23
Total	31	52	17	100

Students who have reading or writing as special interests do significantly better in writing than the other special interest groups.

Concerning the question about time spent in preparation before writing a theme, students responded as indicated in Table XLIV.

Table XLIV

Analysis by Writing Category of the question: How much time do you spend, on the average, in preparation before you write a theme?

Group	Writing Category			
	Good %	Average %	Poor %	Total %
None	27	46	27	15
Less than 1/2 hour	29	53	18	37
About 1 hour	28	59	13	31
More than 1 hr.	41	44	15	17
Total	31	52	17	100

As indicated in Table XLIV there is a relationship between the amount of time spent in preparation before writing a theme and the ability of the writer. Students who spend more than one hour in preparation before writing a theme (17% of the total group) are found in the "good" writer category in significantly greater numbers than would be expected if there were no differences among the groups.

Students who spend no time in preparation before writing a theme are found in the "poor" writer category in significantly greater numbers than would be expected by chance variation alone.

The last two items from the questionnaire are given in Table XLV.

Table XLV

Analysis by Writing Category of the question:
What career goal do you have?

Group	Writing Category			
	Good %	Average %	Poor %	Total %
Teacher	32	48	20	22
Businessman	23	60	17	23
Homemaker	29	58	13	6
Engineer	27	39	34	6
Scientist	33	51	16	6
Physician	42	47	11	7
Lawyer	31	55	14	6
Clergyman	0	0	0	0
Dentist	33	45	22	2
Other	32	52	16	22
Total	31	52	17	100

There is no significant difference among the various career goal groups represented in Table XLV by writing category.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This research was designed to answer some of the questions concerned with the background, "profile" of individuals who are considered "poor" writers. The poor writer was defined as a student who received 'D' or 'E' in writing for the semester previous to this study. A good writer was defined as a student who received 'A' or 'B' and an average writer as one who received 'C' in writing.

A questionnaire was administered to all Writing Conference students and a random sample of students enrolled in the special honors seminars in Humanities. Statistical analysis of the data taken from the questionnaire resulted in profiles of the various writing groups.

All statements about each of the groups are based on statistically significant differences except as noted.

The "poor" writer tends to:

1. be male
2. score lower in all areas of a college aptitude test (SCAT)
3. not differ from other writing categories in intended course of study
4. not differ in age from other writers
5. have the same religious preference as other writing categories
6. not differ from other students in native background, foreign or American
7. (if coming from a home where a foreign language was spoken regularly) be from a home where a romance language was spoken regularly
8. come from a private school other than parochial
9. come from a town of less than 2,500 population
10. not differ from other students for size of senior high school class
11. not differ from other writing categories for size of high school English class

12. come from a family income group that is not different from the other writer categories

13. have fathers who are in a semiskilled occupation

14. have mothers whose occupation, including housewife, does not differ from the other writing categories

15. not differ from other groups for father's educational background

16. have mothers whose educational backgrounds do not differ except for mothers with 9th grade and college freshman backgrounds where there are fewer poor writers, and 10th grade educational backgrounds where there are more

17. select math, science, social studies, and other subjects as those enjoyed most in high school, but not select English

18. have read the daily newspaper in high school the same amount of time as other students except for those who read at 20-30 minutes each day

19. come from home who regularly subscribed to as many magazines as the other writing categories

20. come from homes with no home library

21. have written just as many term papers in their senior year of high school as other students

22. come from high school where essays or themes were not required in their English Composition classes

23. have not been required to read any books aside from text-books during their senior year in high school

24. have done as much voluntary writing during their senior year in high school as other students

25. have voluntarily read as many books during their last two years of high school as other students

26. not differ from other writing categories for the amount of time their high school English classes spent on formal grammar except for those who spent more than one-half time. Students who spent more than one-half time are found less frequently in the "poor" category

27. have read as many unassigned books, on the average, as other students during their first semester in college

28. prefer to read the same kinds of books as other students

29. read the daily newspaper as much as other students except those who spend more than 30 minutes. These students are found less frequently in the "poor" category

30. read magazines 10-15 minutes each week

31. attend movies the same amount of times each week as other groups

32. view TV the same amount of time as other students

33. read comic books to the same extent as other students

34. like to study formal grammar to the same degree as other students except for those who, "like very much to study it." These students are found less frequently in the "poor" writer category

35. not enjoy writing

36. dislike English teachers, but not to a significant degree

37. feel that writing is not as important as other skills

38. be moderately unhappy or very unhappy about things in general

39. have had a negative to very negative attitude toward the Writing Conference

40. have hobbies or special interests similar to other students

41. spend "no" time in preparation before writing a theme

42. have career goals similar to other students

Since the summary just given for the poor writer included both differences and no differences data, the summary for the good writer will contain only the questions where the good writer differs significantly from the other categories.

The good writer tends to:

1. be female

2. score higher in all areas of a college ability test (SCAT)

3. have arts and sciences as intended course of study

4. have eye defects which correct to 20/20

5. come from the south

6. (if coming from a home where a foreign language was spoken regularly) be from a home where a Slavic language was spoken regularly

7. have fathers who are in a skilled worker occupation

8. have enjoyed English classes in high school more than any other subject

9. have done a great deal of voluntary writing during their senior year in high school

10. have been in high school English classes in their last year of high school where more than one-half time was spent on the formal study of grammar

11. prefer to read technical books

12. spend more than thirty minutes each day reading the daily newspaper

13. view TV 11-15 hours each week

14. "like very much" the study of formal grammar

15. enjoy writing in general

16. rate English teachers as "my favorite teachers"

17. have had a very happy overall feeling about things in general during last semester

18. have had a very positive attitude toward the Writing Conference last semester

19. spend more than one hour in preparation before writing a theme

DISCUSSION

Some of the most interesting aspects of the findings of this research have not been discussed in the body of the report. This research has been concerned primarily with the specific background characteristics of the writing groups. It is also very interesting to note the total group statistics from the various tables.

For example: forty-four percent of the research group have eye defects, fifty-seven percent are from the eastern part of the country, thirty-seven percent come from family income groups of over 15,000 and fifty-six percent come from families of over 10,000 dollars income.

These are just a few of the statistics that the reader may obtain from a close study of the report. It is hoped that another report may be written from these data that will discuss other aspects of this research.

APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Office for the Study of Instruction

DIRECTIONS: To help in the evaluation of the writing program in University College it is necessary to ascertain the background and attitude of students enrolled in the program. This questionnaire is anonymous in order that you may be frank and honest in your responses. The validity of this study is directly proportional to the validity of your answer.

You will record your answers on an IBM card. Mark your answer by filling in completely the area defined by the letter on the card. For example, if you choose "A" for your answer fill in the letter "A" after the question number on the IBM card. If you choose "B" fill in the letter "B" after the question number on the IBM card and so on. Make a firm dark line with an electrographic pencil. Do not extend the line beyond the limits of the letter marking position. If you wish to change an answer, erase thoroughly. Make no electrographic marks outside the answer area.

1. If you were in the Writing Conference last semester, mark the grade you received as follows: "A" mark (A), "B" mark (B), "C" mark (C), "D" mark (D), "E" mark (E).

2. If you were not in the Writing Conference last semester, mark the best estimate of your grade in writing as follows: "A" mark (A), "B" mark (B), "C" mark (C), "D" mark (D), "E" mark (E).

3. Intended course of study: If Arts and Sciences mark (A), Business Administration mark (B), Education mark (C), Engineering mark (D), other mark (E).

4. Sex: male mark (A), female mark (B).

5. Age: If less than 18 years mark (A), 18-20 mark (B), 21-22 mark (C), 23-25 mark (D), 26 or older mark (E).

6. What eye defects, if any, do you have? None mark (A), correct to 20-20 with glasses mark (B), do not correct to 20-20 with glasses mark (C), other eye problems that interfere with reading mark (D).

7. What hearing defects, if any, do you have? None mark (A), slight loss, no correction necessary mark (B), loss corrected by hearing aid mark (C), severe loss not corrected by hearing aid mark (D), other ear problems that interfere with listening ability mark (E).

8. Religious preference: If Catholic mark (A), Jewish mark (B), Protestant mark (C), other mark (D), none mark (E).

9. If you have resided in the United States most of your life, find the state where you have spent most of your time and mark in the appropriate space:

   East: Conn., Dela., D.C., Maine, Maryland, N. Hamp., N.J., N.Y., Penn., R.I., Ver. mark (A),

   Midwest: Ill., Ind., Iowa, Kan., Mich., Minn., Missouri, Neb., N.D., Ohio, Okla., S.D., Wisc. mark (B),

   South: Ala., Ark., Fla., Ga., Kentucky, La., Miss., N.C., S.C., Tenn., Texas, Va., W. Va. mark (C),

   West: Alaska, Ariz., Calif., Colo., Hawaii, Idaho, Mon., Nev., N. Mex., Oreg., Utah, Wash., Wyo. mark (D).

10. If you have resided in a country other than the United States most of your life, find the general area and mark as indicated: Cuba, Puerto Rico, Central or South American countries mark (A), European mark (B), Asian mark (C), African mark (D), other foreign countries mark (E).

11. What foreign language, if any, was spoken regularly in your home? None mark (A), Teutonic (German, Scandinavian, Dutch, etc.) mark (B), Romance (French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, etc., mark (C), Slavic (Czechoslovakian, Polish, Russian, etc.) mark (D), other mark (E).

12. What type of high school did you attend? public mark (A), private, other than parochial, mark (B), parochial mark (C).

13. What is the approximate population of the town in which you lived during the major part of the five years before coming to college? Less than 2,500 mark (A), 2,500 to 10,000 mark (B), 10,000 to 100,000 mark (C), 100,000 to 500,000 mark (D), over 500,000 mark (E).

14. Approximate size of your senior high school class: Less than 50 mark (A), 50-200 mark (B), 200-500 mark (C), 500-1,000 mark (D), over 1,000 mark (E).

15. What was the average size (number of students) of your English classes in high school? Less than 15 mark (A), 15-25 mark (B), 26-35 mark (C), 36-45 mark (D), more than 45 mark (E).

16. Approximate family income: Under $5,000 per year mark (A), $5,000-$8,000 mark (B), $8,000-$10,000 mark (C), $10,000-$15,000 mark (D), over $15,000 mark (E).

17. Father's occupation or what it was if he is not living or working now:

    Businessman, e.g. proprietor, manager, business official, farmer, wholesale and retail dealer (not salesman) mark (A),

    Semiskilled or unskilled worker, e.g. taxi driver, machine tender, deliveryman, laborer, etc. mark (B),

    Skilled worker or foreman, e.g. carpenter, electrician, machinist, etc. mark (C),

    Clerk or kindred worker, e.g. "white-collar worker", office worker, salesman, bill collector, mail carrier, etc. mark (D),

    Professional, e.g. accountant, auditor, clergyman, college professor and instructor, dentist, engineer, lawyer, pharmacist, physician, social worker, school teacher and official, nurse, etc. mark (E).

18. If your mother is employed outside the home, in which one of the occupations as described under question 17 is she engaged? Businessman mark (A), Semiskilled or unskilled mark (B), Skilled worker or foreman mark (C), Clerk or kindred worker mark (D), Professional mark (E).

19. Mark according to highest grade completed by your father (pre-college): 8th grade or less mark (A), 9th grade mark (B), 10th grade mark (C), 11th grade mark (D), 12th grade mark (E).

20. If your father attended college, mark highest level completed: Freshman mark (A), Sophomore mark (B), Junior mark (C), Senior mark (D), Graduate mark (E).

21. Mark according to highest grade completed by your mother (pre-college): 8th grade or less mark (A), 9th grade mark (B), 10th grade mark (C), 11th grade mark (D), 12th grade mark (E).

22. If your mother attended college mark highest level completed: Freshman mark (A), Sophomore mark (B), Junior mark (C), Senior mark (D), Graduate mark (E).

23. What course did you enjoy most in high school: (mark first choice only) English mark (A), Math mark (B), Science mark (C), Social Studies mark (D), other mark (E).

24. How much time did you spend each day reading the daily newspaper during your senior year in high school? None mark (A), 5-10 minutes mark (B), 10-20 minutes mark (C), 20-30 minutes mark (D), over 30 minutes mark (E).

25. How many magazines were regularly subscribed to in your home? None mark (A), one mark (B), two mark (C), three mark (D), four or more mark (E).

26. Approximately how many books were in your home "library" excluding technical books, standard references, and Bibles? None mark (A), 5-10 mark (B), 10-30 mark (C), 30-100 mark (D), over 100 mark (E).

27. How many term papers (of considerable length and due at the end of the term) were required by your courses in your senior year in high school? None mark (A), one mark (B), two mark (C), three mark (D), four or more mark (E).

28. Approximately how many themes or essays were required each semester in your English Composition classes in high school? None mark (A), 1-3 mark (B), 4-6 mark (C), 7-9 mark (D), more than 9 mark (E).

29. Aside from text books, how many books were you required to read in your senior year in high school? None mark (A), 1 mark (B), 2-5 mark (C), 6-10 mark (D), more than 10 mark (E).

30. How much voluntary writing did you do during your senior year in high school? (e.g. letters, short stories, essays, plays, poetry, etc.) None mark (A), very little mark (B), a great deal mark (C).

31. Approximately how many books did you read voluntarily during your last two years of high school? None mark (A), 1-2 mark (B), 3-5 mark (C), 6-10 mark (D), more than 10 mark (E).

32. Approximately how much time during your last year in high school English classes did you spend on the formal study of grammar? None mark (A), some, but less than one-fourth of the time mark (B), about one-fourth of the time mark (C), about one-half of the time mark (D), more than one-half of the time mark (E).

33. Other than assigned reading, how many books have you read since the beginning of the first semester this year? None mark (A), 1-2 mark (B), 3-5 mark (C), 6-10 mark (D), more than 10 mark (E).

34. What kind of books do you prefer to read (mark first choice only): Non-fiction (e.g. biographies, histories, etc.) mark (A), fiction mark (B), technical (e.g. medical, math, engineering) mark (C).

35. How much time do you now spend each day reading the daily newspaper? None mark (A), 5-10 minutes mark (B), 10-20 minutes mark (C), 20-30 minutes mark (D), more than 30 minutes mark (E).

36. How much time do you now spend each week reading magazines? None mark (A), 5-10 minutes mark (B), 10-30 minutes mark (C), 30 minutes to 1 hour mark (D), more than one hour mark (E).

37. On the average, how often do you now attend the movies each week? Once mark (A), two to three times mark (B), four or five times mark (C), more than five times mark (D), very seldom attend mark (E).

38. How many hours do you spend viewing TV each week? None mark (A), 1-5 mark (B), 6-10 mark (C), 11-15 mark (D), more than 15 mark (E).

39. On the average, how many comic books do you read each week? None mark (A), 1 or 2 mark (B), 2 to 5 mark (C), 5 to 10 mark (D), over 10 mark (E).

40. How do you feel about the study of formal grammar? Hate to study it mark (A), would rather not study it mark (B), don't feel one way or another mark (C), like to study it mark (D), like very much to study it mark (E).

41. How do you feel about writing in general? I enjoy writing mark (A), I neither like nor dislike writing mark (B), I do not enjoy writing mark (C).

42. What is your general feeling about English teachers? My favorite teachers mark (A), I like them in general mark (B), I don't like them any better or any worse than others mark (C), I don't like them in general mark (D), the most disliked of all mark (E).

43. The ability to write well is: One's most important skill mark (A), an important skill mark (B), no more or less important than other skills mark (C), not as important as other skills mark (D), the least important of the skills mark (E).

44. What was your overall feeling about things in general during most of last semester? Very happy mark (A), moderately happy mark (B), neither happy nor unhappy mark (C), moderately unhappy mark (D), very unhappy mark (E).

45. My general attitude toward the Writing Conference last semester was: very positive mark (A), positive mark (B), neither positive nor negative mark (C), negative mark (D), very negative mark (E).

46. If you have a hobby or special interest please indicate it here or after question number 47 (mark one only, just your major interest): None mark (A), reading mark (B), writing mark (C), coin collecting mark (D), stamp collecting mark (E).

47. Continued from number 46, hobby or special interest (do not mark if you marked one for number 46): auto mechanics mark (A), photography mark (B), spectator sports mark (C), participating sports mark (D), other mark (E).

48. How much time do you spend, on the average, in preparation before you write a theme? None, just begin writing mark (A), less than half an hour mark (B), about one hour mark (C), more than one hour mark (D).

49. What career goal do you have (mark one only): teacher mark (A), businessman mark (B), homemaker mark (C), engineer mark (D), scientist mark (E).

50. Continued from number 49, career goals (do not mark if you marked one for number 49): physician mark (A), lawyer mark (B), clergyman mark (C), dentist mark (D), other mark (E).